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FBI Leaks Feared By Helms

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Fears that sensitive CIA operations might be compromised by "leakage in the FBI" led Richard M. Helms, the agency's former director, to propose sharply defined limits on the Watergate investigation in Mexico.

Helms was also concerned about an FBI "fishing expedition into CIA operations" when he laid down guidelines 11 days after the Watergate break-in designed to confine the FBI's inquiries to "personalities already arrested or directly under suspicion."

This was the gist of four-page memorandum submitted yesterday by CIA Director William E. Colby to Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), acting chairman of the Senate Armed Service Committee.

Colby's memo was intended to clear up what he described as "recent speculation in the press and elsewhere" over an apparent conflict between a June 28, 1972, memo from Helms to his deputy, Gen. Vernon Walters, and testimony by Helms to five congressional committees and federal Watergate prosecutors.

This conflict was first mentioned—although without any specific reference to Helms—by former Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox in an appearance last week before the Senate Judiciary Committee. Cox said he had evidence that a major witness in the Watergate inquiry had sharply contradicted his testimony in a memorandum that had come to the attention of the prosecuting staff.

The newly surfaced 1972 memo instructed Walters that "we (the CIA) still adhere to the request that they (the FBI) confine themselves to the personalities already arrested or directly under suspicion and that they desist from expending this investigation into other areas which may well, eventually, run afoul of our operations."

But Helms and Walters have repeatedly testified that they told White House officials and former FBI Acting Director L. Patrick Gray III that the Watergate investigation in Mexico would not jeopardize any CIA activities.

Colby's memo to Symington alluded to a strong sense of suspicion within the CIA over the prospective FBI investigation of the Watergate scandal's Mexican connection.

He cited as one ingredient of the CIA's concern Gray's persistence—despite repeated denials by Helms—"in querying the Agency about possible CIA involvement in the Watergate incident."

He also recalled that the FBI refused to inform the CIA on June 22, 1972, of the status of its investigation into the activities of James McCord, a former CIA employee, who was one of the convicted Watergate conspirators.

"In light of these developments, and particularly because of the additional fact that there had been recent leaks of sensitive information provided by CIA to the FBI, Mr. Helms felt it necessary to give specific guidance for Agency officials acting during his forthcoming absence to discourage FBI investigation into Agency operations unless specific reason or justification therefor was offered," said Colby.

However, the FBI investigation that White House officials sought to shut off was not directed as the CIA but at the establishment of a link between Watergate funds and the Nixon re-election committee.

White House officials, acting on instructions from the President, first raised the prospect that the FBI pursuit of the Watergate funds through a Mexico City bank account could jeopardize covert CIA operations in Mexico. Helms and Walters had testified that they repeatedly assured White House officials that no agency operations would be so imperiled.

The Helms memo to Walters, however, tended to give legitimacy to the concern originally expressed by the White House and which President Nixon, in his Aug. 22 statement, said proved to be unfounded.

Colby's memo yesterday to Symington failed to clear up what is still a central contradiction in the record of the CIA's involvement in the Watergate cover-up.

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